

National Guard and Reserves is focus of Commission

By Stanton Thompson

Commissioner

Commission on the National Guard and Reserves

I am a native Missourian, living in Higginsville, and it's my privilege to be one of 13 military, government, and business leaders who embarked in March on an in-depth examination of how this nation has been using, and should be using, its National Guard and Reserves.

Our independent Commission on the National Guard and Reserves is charged by Congress to identify changes that must be made in laws and policies to ensure that the National Guard and Reserves are organized, tasked, trained, equipped, compensated, and supported to best meet our national security requirements in the uncertain years ahead.

The time for a comprehensive assessment has clearly arrived. The National Guard and Reserves once served as a strategic military reserve; today they serve as an operational reserve in day-to-day support of missions around the globe, and are now experiencing the highest mobilization rate since the Korean War.

Today's National Guard and Reserves are in the national spotlight as never



Missouri Representative Ike Skelton, ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, testified March 8 in Washington in the first hearing held by the newly created Commission on the National Guard and Reserves.

views of all who are involved, and have a stake, in the National Guard and Reserves. In the four public hearings we have held thus far, we have heard from those who command the seven reserve components, from enlisted personnel at all levels, from governors, and from experts on relevant issues. A report we issued in June, 90 days into the Commission's undertaking, spelled out

revised and updated;

- Confusion regarding chains of command when federal, state, and local authorities respond to domestic disasters must be remedied;

- Defense Department and other federal agency engagement with governors regarding reserve components can contribute to national security and should be strengthened.

The task of defending the nation against its enemies has changed dramatically. Congress recognizes that the nation's use of its total military force, including its National Guard and Reserves, must change in ways that will have profound implications for each of the reserve components, for the men and women who serve, for their families, and for their communities.

Congress created our Commission to recommend how the nation's laws and policies must be written to reflect the changes that are needed; the process is well under way.

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before. Their continuing, visible operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have heightened public awareness of their capabilities and contributions, on the one hand, and of the casualties they are incurring and the effects of unusually long deployments on their families and livelihoods, on the other.

The homeland security assignments they were given following 9/11, the disaster response roles they played in the aftermath of last year's Gulf Coast hurricanes and, most recently, the support they have been providing the Border Patrol on our border with Mexico have served as reminders of the kinds of demands Americans expect their National Guard and Reserves will be available to meet here at home at any time.

Our Commission is determined that the assessment process will include the

the initial findings that are guiding the remainder of our work.

Initial findings include the following observations:

- America faces the most diverse, complex, and unpredictable security environment in our history;

- Responding to the challenges of the "long war" will have profound and lasting implications for the nation, the military services, and the reserve components;

- The sustained operational use of and potential future demands on the reserve components pose challenges that must be addressed;

- A balance between the uses of the reserve components as an operational and as a strategic reserve must be achieved;

- Statutes and policies that adversely affect the reserve components must be

Detailed information on the Commission on the National Guard and Reserves, including biographical information on Commissioner Thompson, may be found at www.cngr.gov.

